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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004487

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: MODERATE FRONT DISCUSSIONS CONTINUE: NO AGREEMENT  
YET

REF: BAGHDAD 4440

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶1. (S) SUMMARY.** President Talabani, Prime Minister Maliki, and other Iraqi leaders met December 6 to continue discussing the formation of a moderate political front. They were unable to reach agreement on how to organize themselves. Two options emerged: (1) expand the Presidency Council to include Barzani and Maliki; or (2) create a leadership committee of the five leaders (Talabani, Al Hashemi, Abdel Mehdi, Maliki, and Barzani). Talabani and Maliki will meet again December 7 to try to reach agreement. The Prime Minister exhibited concern that the first option would expand the powers of the presidency at the expense of the prime minister; whereas he was looking primarily for a new center of political support. While critical of the Political Council for National Security (PCNS), the leaders defended its role as a place where all political forces are represented. The PM said the door must be kept open to other political parties and that the new executive body should not replace existing administrative bodies. Instead, it should handle strategic issues and be the engine to bring people together and push decisions through the PCNS, Council of Minister, and Council of Representatives though the weight of the moderate front members. END SUMMARY.

**¶2. (S)** President Jalal Talabani hosted the moderate front group at his residential complex. The other Iraqi participants attending were Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki; Deputy Presidents Tariq al-Hashimi and Adil Abd al-Mahdi; KRG President Masoud Barzani; and Council of Representatives member and former Deputy Prime Minister Rowsh Shaways (KDP). The Ambassador also attended.

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Leaders Discuss Details of New Executive Body  
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**¶3. (S)** Vice President Abd al-Mahdi began the meeting by presenting documents (drafted by him and former DPM Rowsh Shaways) that provided additional details on the structure of the moderate front (reftel). He described the proposals as an attempt to unite the government between the political blocs (parallel to the political process) by joining together moderate forces to pull in other political groups. The two proposals are (a) to form a national front and (b) to form an executive body that would help deal with major decisions and come up with recommendations. Abd al-Mahdi said this body would help the work of the Policy Council for National Security (PCNS) and not replace it; he stated there is no harm in a "kitchen" or mini-cabinet. He stated that the executive body would consist of the Presidency Council, the Prime Minister, the KRG President, and three unnamed members that could be from other political forces.

¶4. (S) Vice President Al-Hashimi and KRG President Barzani expressed no reservations on the proposal, but al-Hashimi added that the executive body should review the progress in implementing not just the 33-point national unity government program, but also other agreements. He said the document should also include a timetable for this review. While criticizing the lack of structure within the PCNS, al-Hashimi stated that the framework of the PCNS needs to be re-examined to ensure that there are no conflicts of authorities between the two bodies (determine what matters are discussed within the PCNS and what matters within the new executive body). Abd al-Mahdi defended the PCNS, saying it needs to be kept in place to maintain balance since all political forces are represented in the PCNS. He said the new executive body is being created to help government, not to take away authorities. Abd al-Mahdi added that PM needs to feel this body is supportive of him and will help him to take tough decisions. Barzani reiterated that the most important thing is to provide support to the PM to reinforce rule of law and the government.

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PM's Reservations: Need Political, Not Admin Support  
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¶5. (S) Prime Minister al-Maliki expressed his concern that the group was moving in a different direction from the initial intent. The initial idea was that moderate, responsible forces which believe in the political process would come together to preserve and expand the government base. This would allow the government to move away from the quota system. The PM said the current proposals represent a mix of political and administrative ideas. The door must be kept open to other political forces; if closed, those left

BAGHDAD 00004487 002 OF 002

out would band together. He asked, "If the new executive body is administrative, what is the point of the Council of Ministers (CoM) and Council of Representatives (CoR)?" The PM said this new body should not replace existing administrative and executive bodies, but should handle strategic issues and be the engine to bring people together and push decisions through the PCNS, CoM, and CoR though the weight of the moderate front members.

¶6. (S) President Talabani agreed with the PM, highlighting the initial thought of the executive body as a political marja'iya to deal with big issues. It should be comprised of political leaders and be open to others. Barzani agreed, saying this body should deal with the large, strategic issues since it is really difficult to discuss them in the PCNS and CoR because of the number of people. Al-Hashimi replied that the government program was agreed to by all parties, the core of which is moderate forces. What is needed is something to enforce implementation.

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Discussions Continue After PM Leaves  
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¶7. (S) Discussions continued after the PM and the Ambassador departed. Al-Hashimi stated that the real Sunni problem is the lack of real participation. While highlighting the importance of being present and participating in the decision-making, Abd al-Mahdi said the issue is not the PM, who leads the government and should be representative of national front, not just one party or group. Talabani agreed with al-Hashimi that there must be executive mechanisms for the moderate front, saying that any front has these. Talabani stressed the need for a working political marja'iya, not just words. Abd al-Mahdi said they will reach a conclusion through negotiations, with Talabani and Barzani reiterating the need to work with and support the PM. Before the meeting adjourned, al-Hashimi said the issue of balance also needs to be addressed.

¶ 18. (S) In a subsequent meeting with the Ambassador, Barzani, and Maliki, additional discussion on the formation of an "executive body" (para 3 above) occurred. Maliki made clear his objection to a proposal that the Presidency Council, with the addition of Maliki and Barzani, would become an "executive body." His concern reflected his fear that this would expand the powers of the Presidency at the expense of the Prime Minister. He noted that the Presidency Council has its own unique role according to the Constitution, and the Presidency must be kept separate from the Prime Ministry. Maliki seemed more comfortable with an alternate idea of a "committee of the five leaders" (Talabani, Barzani, Maliki, Abdel Mehdi, Al Hashemi) that could meet weekly to agree on major issues so as to energize their blocs to support and enable the Prime Minister to execute the government's policies.

¶ 19. (S) Discussions between the leaders may continue December 7, with Talabani also calling for a PCNS meeting December 9.  
Khalilzad